

## ***The Five Most Common Cancer Sites***

The most common types of cancer reported among Washington residents during 1994 were breast, prostate, lung, colorectal, and melanoma.

- 1** 4,221 new cases of female breast cancer were reported. Breast cancer is by far the most frequently diagnosed cancer among women. Responsible for 745 deaths in 1994, it is the second most common cause of cancer mortality for women. Nationally, breast cancer incidence has been increasing approximately 1% per year for the past 50 years. (NCI, 1997) Because the cause of most breast cancer is unknown and the known risk factors are not easy to modify, the best strategy for prevention of breast cancer mortality is early detection and treatment. While experts do not agree on the benefits of mammography screening for women under 50 years old, regular breast cancer screening with mammography and clinical breast exam reduces the number of deaths from breast cancer for women age 50 and older. (NCI, 1997) The American Cancer Society recommends clinical breast exam and mammography for women between 40 and 49 years old. (ACS, 1995) While evidence about the efficacy of self-breast exam is mixed (NCI, 1997), the American Cancer Society recommends monthly self-breast exams beginning at age 20. (ACS, 1995)
- 2** 3,408 new cases of prostate gland cancer were reported, making prostate cancer the second most commonly diagnosed malignancy overall, and the most commonly reported malignancy among men. It is the second leading cause of cancer death among men, killing 662 men in 1994. Nationally, both incidence and mortality rates for prostate cancer have been increasing. (NCI, 1997) Increased detection through screening most likely contributes to the more recent increases in prostate cancer incidence. (NCI, 1997) No effective means are currently available to prevent the development of this cancer. Unfortunately, prostate cancer screening has yet to demonstrate clear benefit in reducing the death toll. (NCI, 1997)
- 3** 3,386 new cases of lung cancer were reported. 2,829 Washingtonians died of lung cancer, making it the leading cause of cancer mortality. Cigarette smoking is by far the most important cause of lung cancer. Nationally, approximately 90% of male and 72% of female lung cancer deaths are attributed to smoking. (CDC, 1997) Studies have failed to provide evidence that screening can reduce mortality. Reduction in smoking remains the major focus of efforts to prevent lung cancer.
- 4** 2,670 new cases of colon and rectum cancer were reported. Colorectal cancer is the state's second leading cause of cancer death, resulting in the loss of 1,007 lives in 1994. Nationally, the incidence of colorectal cancer is increasing while the mortality rate is decreasing. (NCI, 1997) Regular screening of the stool for invisible amounts of blood beginning at age 45 and regular visual examination of the lower bowel (sigmoidoscopy) beginning at

age 50 have been shown to reduce mortality. (NCI, 1997) Research evidence indicates that regular physical activity and a low fat, high fiber diet rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk for colon and rectum cancer. (ACS, 1996; CDC, 1996)

- 5 1,270 new cases of melanoma of the skin were reported. Melanoma accounted for 106 deaths in Washington residents. Nationally, the incidence of melanoma has been increasing for several decades. (NCI, 1997) There is evidence that avoiding sunburns, especially during childhood and adolescence, may be effective in preventing melanoma. (NCI, 1997) There is also evidence that routine examination of the skin is effective in reducing mortality from melanoma. (NCI, 1997)